

Winston Churchill Discreetly Veiled, Part 1

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Churchill as Icon

When Professor Harry Jaffa proposed that Winston Churchill was not only the Man of the Twentieth Century but The Man of Many Centuries,[\[1\]](#) he found that many agreed with him. I did not.

Personally, Man of Many Centuries sounds absurd. Was Winnie greater than Bismarck, than Washington or Jefferson, than Isaac Newton or Martin Luther? But Man of the Twentieth Century is totally appropriate, for that was the century of the State — of the rise and hypertrophic growth of the welfare-warfare state — and Churchill was from first to last a Man of the State, of the welfare state and of the warfare state. War, of course, was his lifelong passion; and, as an admiring historian has written: "Among his other claims to fame, Winston Churchill ranks as one of the founders of the welfare state."[\[2\]](#) Thus, while Churchill never had a principle he did not in the end betray,[\[3\]](#) this does not mean that there was no slant to his actions, no systematic bias. There was, and that bias was towards lowering the barriers to state power.

To gain any understanding of Churchill, we must go beyond the heroic images propagated for over half a century. The conventional picture of Churchill, especially of his role in World War II, was first of all the work of Churchill himself, through the distorted histories he composed and rushed into print as soon as the war was over.[\[4\]](#) In more recent decades, the Churchill legend has been adopted by an internationalist establishment for which it furnishes the perfect symbol and an inexhaustible vein of high-toned blather. Churchill has become, in Christopher Hitchens's phrase, a "totem" of the American establishment, not only to the scions of the New Deal, but to the neo-conservative apparatus as well — politicians like Newt Gingrich and Dan Quayle, corporate "knights" and other denizens of the Reagan and Bush Cabinets, the editors and writers of the *Wall Street Journal*, and a legion of "conservative" columnists led by William Safire and William Buckley. Churchill was, as Hitchens writes, "the human bridge across which the transition was made" between a noninterventionist and a globalist America.[\[5\]](#) In the Twenty-First Century, it is not impossible that his bulldog likeness will feature in the logo of the New World Order.

Let it be freely conceded that in 1940 Churchill played his role superbly. As the military historian Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, a sharp critic of Churchill's wartime policies, wrote: "Churchill was a man cast in the heroic mold, a berserker ever ready to lead a forlorn hope or storm a breach, and at his best when things were at their worst. His glamorous rhetoric, his pugnacity, and his insistence on annihilating the enemy appealed to human instincts, and made him an outstanding war leader."[\[6\]](#) History outdid herself when she cast Churchill as the adversary in the duel with Hitler. It matters not at all that in his most famous speech — "we shall fight them on the beaches ... we shall fight them in the fields and in the streets" — he plagiarized Clemenceau at the time of the Ludendorff offensive, that there was little real threat of a German invasion or, that, perhaps, there was no reason for the duel to have occurred in the first place. For a few months in 1940, Churchill played his part magnificently and unforgettably.[\[7\]](#)

Opportunism and Rhetoric

Yet before 1940, the word most closely associated with Churchill was "opportunist."^[8] He had twice changed his party affiliation — from Conservative to Liberal, and then back again. His move to the Liberals was allegedly on the issue of free trade. But in 1930, he sold out on free trade as well, even tariffs on food, and proclaimed that he had cast off "Cobdenism" forever.^[9] As head of the Board of Trade before World War I, he opposed increased armaments; after he became First Lord of the Admiralty in 1911, he pushed for bigger and bigger budgets, spreading wild rumors of the growing strength of the German Navy, just as he did in the 1930s about the buildup of the German Air Force.^[10] He attacked socialism before and after World War I, while during the War he promoted war-socialism, calling for nationalization of the railroads, and declaring in a speech: "Our whole nation must be organized, must be socialized if you like the word."^[11] Churchill's opportunism continued to the end. In the 1945 election, he briefly latched on to Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, and tried to paint the Labor Party as totalitarian, while it was Churchill himself who, in 1943, had accepted the Beveridge plans for the post-war welfare state and Keynesian management of the economy. Throughout his career his one guiding rule was to climb to power and stay there.

There *were* two principles that for a long while seemed dear to Churchill's heart. One was anti-Communism: he was an early and fervent opponent of Bolshevism. For years, he — very correctly — decried the "bloody baboons" and "foul murderers of Moscow." His deep early admiration of Benito Mussolini was rooted in his shrewd appreciation of what Mussolini had accomplished (or so he thought). In an Italy teetering on the brink of Leninist revolution, Il Duce had discovered the one formula that could counteract the Leninist appeal: hypernationalism with a social slant. Churchill lauded "Fascismo's triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism," claiming that "it proved the necessary antidote to the Communist poison."^[12]

Yet the time came when Churchill made his peace with Communism. In 1941, he gave unconditional support to Stalin, welcomed him as an ally, embraced him as a friend. Churchill, as well as Roosevelt, used the affectionate nickname, "Uncle Joe"; as late as the Potsdam conference, he repeatedly announced, of Stalin: "I like that man."^[13] In suppressing the evidence that the Polish officers at Katyn had been murdered by the Soviets, he remarked: "There is no use prowling round the three year old graves of Smolensk."^[14] Obsessed not only with defeating Hitler, but with destroying Germany, Churchill was oblivious to the danger of a Soviet inundation of Europe until it was far too late. The climax of his infatuation came at the November, 1943, Tehran conference, when Churchill presented Stalin with a Crusader's sword.^[15] Those who are concerned to define the word "obscenity" may wish to ponder that episode.

Finally, there was what appeared to be the abiding love of his life, the British Empire. If Churchill stood *for anything at all*, it was the Empire; he famously said that he had not become Prime Minister in order to preside over its liquidation. But that, of course, is precisely what he did, selling out the Empire and everything else for the sake of total victory over Germany.

Besides his opportunism, Churchill was noted for his remarkable rhetorical skill. This talent helped him wield power over men, but it pointed to a fateful failing as well. Throughout his life, many who observed Churchill closely noted a peculiar trait. In 1917, Lord Esher described it in this way:

He handles great subjects in rhythmical language, and becomes quickly enslaved to his own phrases. He deceives himself into the belief that he takes broad views, when his mind is fixed upon one comparatively small aspect of the question.^[16]

During World War II, Robert Menzies, who was the Prime Minister of Australia, said of Churchill: "His real tyrant is the glittering phrase — so attractive to his mind that awkward facts have to give way."[\[17\]](#) Another associate wrote: "He is ... the slave of the words which his mind forms about ideas... And he can convince himself of almost every truth if it is once allowed thus to start on its wild career through his rhetorical machinery."[\[18\]](#)

But while Winston had no principles, there was one constant in his life: the love of war. It began early. As a child, he had a huge collection of toy soldiers, 1500 of them, and he played with them for many years after most boys turn to other things. They were "all British," he tells us, and he fought battles with his brother Jack, who "was only allowed to have colored troops; and they were not allowed to have artillery."[\[19\]](#) He attended Sandhurst, the military academy, instead of the universities, and "from the moment that Churchill left Sandhurst ... he did his utmost to get into a fight, wherever a war was going on."[\[20\]](#) All his life he was most excited — on the evidence, only really excited — by war. He loved war as few modern men ever have[\[21\]](#) — he even "loved the bangs," as he called them, and he was very brave under fire.



The Prime Minister Winston Churchill fires a Thompson "Tommy" submachine gun alongside Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force General Dwight D Eisenhower as American soldiers

look on in southern England in late March 1944.

By War Office official photographer Horton (Cpt) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

In 1925, Churchill wrote: "The story of the human race is war."^[22] This, however, is untrue; potentially, it is disastrously untrue. Churchill lacked any grasp of the fundamentals of the social philosophy of classical liberalism. In particular, he never understood that, as Ludwig von Mises explained, the true story of the human race is the extension of social cooperation and the division of labor. Peace, not war, is the father of all things.^[23] For Churchill, the years without war offered nothing to him but "the bland skies of peace and platitude." This was a man, as we shall see, who wished for more wars than *actually happened*.

When he was posted to India and began to read avidly, to make up for lost time, Churchill was profoundly impressed by Darwinism. He lost whatever religious faith he may have had — through reading Gibbon, he said — and took a particular dislike, for some reason, to the Catholic Church, as well as Christian missions. He became, in his own words, "a materialist — to the tips of my fingers," and he fervently upheld the worldview that human life is a struggle for existence, with the outcome the survival of the fittest.^[24] This philosophy of life and history Churchill expressed in his one novel, *Savrola*.^[25] That Churchill was a racist goes without saying, yet his racism went deeper than with most of his contemporaries.^[26] It is curious how, with his stark Darwinian outlook, his elevation of war to the central place in human history, and his racism, as well as his fixation on "great leaders," Churchill's worldview resembled that of his antagonist, Hitler.

When Churchill was not actually engaged in war, he was reporting on it. He early made a reputation for himself as a war correspondent, in Kitchener's campaign in the Sudan and in the Boer War. In December 1900, a dinner was given at the Waldorf-Astoria in honor of the young journalist, recently returned from his well-publicized adventures in South Africa. Mark Twain, who introduced him, had already, it seems, caught on to Churchill. In a brief satirical speech, Twain slyly suggested that, with his English father and American mother, Churchill was the perfect representative of Anglo-American cant.^[27]

Churchill and the "New Liberalism"

In 1900 Churchill began the career he was evidently fated for. His background — the grandson of a duke and son of a famous Tory politician — got him into the House of Commons as a Conservative. At first he seemed to be distinguished only by his restless ambition, remarkable even in parliamentary ranks. But in 1904, he crossed the floor to the Liberals, supposedly on account of his free-trade convictions. However, Robert Rhodes James, one of Churchill's admirers, wrote: "It was believed [at the time], probably rightly, that if Arthur Balfour had given him office in 1902, Churchill would not have developed such a burning interest in free trade and joined the Liberals." Clive Ponting notes that: "as he had already admitted to Rosebery, he was looking for an excuse to defect from a party that seemed reluctant to recognize his talents," and the Liberals would not accept a protectionist.^[28]

Tossed by the tides of faddish opinion,^[29] with no principles of his own and hungry for power, Churchill soon became an adherent of the "New Liberalism," an updated version of his father's "Tory Democracy." The "new" liberalism differed from the "old" only in the small matter of substituting incessant state activism for laissez-faire.

Although his conservative idolaters seem blithely unaware of the fact — for them it is always 1940 — Churchill was one of the chief architects of the welfare state in Britain. The modern welfare state, successor to the welfare state of 18th-century absolutism, began in the 1880s in Germany, under Bismarck.^[30] In England, the legislative turning point came when Asquith succeeded Campbell-Bannerman as Prime Minister in 1908; his reorganized cabinet included David Lloyd George at the Exchequer and Churchill at the Board of Trade.

Of course, "the electoral dimension of social policy was well to the fore in Churchill's thinking," writes a sympathetic historian — meaning that Churchill understood it as the way to win votes.^[31] He wrote to a friend:

No legislation at present in view interests the democracy. All their minds are turning more and more to the social and economic issue. This revolution is irresistible. They will not tolerate the existing system by which wealth is acquired, shared and employed.... They will set their faces like flint against the money power — heir of all other powers and tyrannies overthrown — and its obvious injustices. And this theoretical repulsion will ultimately extend to any party associated in maintaining the status quo.... Minimum standards of wages and comfort, insurance in some effective form or other against sickness, unemployment, old age, these are the questions and the only questions by which parties are going to live in the future. Woe to Liberalism, if they slip through its fingers.^[32]

Churchill "had already announced his conversion to a collectivist social policy" before his move to the Board of Trade.^[33] His constant theme became "the just precedence" of public over private interests. He took up the fashionable social-engineering clichés of the time, asserting that: "Science, physical and political alike, revolts at the disorganization which glares at us in so many aspects of modern life," and that "the nation demands the application of drastic corrective and curative processes." The state was to acquire canals and railroads, develop certain national industries, provide vastly augmented education, introduce the eight-hour work day, levy progressive taxes, and guarantee a national minimum living standard. It is no wonder that Beatrice Webb noted that Churchill was "definitely casting in his lot with the constructive state action."^[34]

It is curious how, with his stark Darwinian outlook, his elevation of war to the central place in human history, and his racism, as well as his fixation on "great leaders," Churchill's worldview resembled that of his antagonist, Hitler.

Following a visit to Germany, Lloyd George and Churchill were both converted to the Bismarckian model of social insurance schemes.^[35] As Churchill told his constituents: "My heart was filled with admiration of the patient genius which had added these social bulwarks to the many glories of the German race."^[36] He set out, in his words, to "thrust a big slice of Bismarckianism over the whole underside of our industrial system."^[37] In 1908, Churchill announced in a speech in Dundee: "I am on the side of those who think that a greater collective sentiment should be introduced into the State and the municipalities. I should like to see the State undertaking new functions." Still, individualism must be respected: "No man can be a collectivist alone or an individualist alone. He must be both an individualist and a collectivist. The nature of man is a dual nature. The character of the organization of human society is dual."^[38] This, by the way, is a good sample of Churchill as political philosopher: it never gets much better.

But while both "collective organization" and "individual incentive" must be given their due, Churchill was certain which had gained the upper hand:

The whole tendency of civilisation is, however, towards the multiplication of the collective functions of society. The ever-growing complications of civilisation create for us new services which have to be undertaken by the State, and create for us an expansion of existing services. ... There is a pretty steady determination ... to intercept all future unearned increment which may arise from the increase in the speculative value of the land. There will be an ever-widening area of municipal enterprise.

The statist trend met with Churchill's complete approval. As he added:

I go farther; I should like to see the State embark on various novel and adventurous experiments.... I am very sorry we have not got the railways of this country in our hands. We may do something better with the canals. [39]

This grandson of a duke and glorifier of his ancestor, the arch-corruptionist Marlborough, was not above pandering to lower-class resentments. Churchill claimed that "the cause of the Liberal Party is the cause of the left-out millions," while he attacked the Conservatives as "the Party of the rich against the poor, the classes and their dependents against the masses, of the lucky, the wealthy, the happy, and the strong, against the left-out and the shut-out millions of the weak and poor." [40] Churchill became the perfect hustling political entrepreneur, eager to politicize one area of social life after the other. He berated the Conservatives for lacking even a "single plan of social reform or reconstruction," while boasting that he and his associates intended to propose "a wide, comprehensive, interdependent scheme of social organization," incorporated in "a massive series of legislative proposals and administrative acts." [41]

At this time, Churchill fell under the influence of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, the leaders of the Fabian Society. At one of her famous strategic dinner parties, Beatrice Webb introduced Churchill to a young protégé, William — later Lord — Beveridge. Churchill brought Beveridge into the Board of Trade as his advisor on social questions, thus starting him on his illustrious career. [42] Besides pushing for a variety of social insurance schemes, Churchill created the system of national labor exchanges: he wrote to Prime Minister Asquith of the need to "spread ... a sort of Germanized network of state intervention and regulation" over the British labor market. [43] But Churchill entertained much more ambitious goals for the Board of Trade. He proposed a plan whereby:

The Board of Trade was to act as the "intelligence department" of the Government, forecasting trade and employment in the regions so that the Government could allocate contracts to the most deserving areas. At the summit ... would be a Committee of National Organisation, chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to supervise the economy. [44]

Finally, well aware of the electoral potential of organized labor, Churchill became a champion of the labor unions. He was a leading supporter, for instance, of the Trades Disputes Act of 1906. [45] This Act reversed the Taff Vale and other judicial decisions, which had held unions responsible for torts and wrongs committed on their behalf by their agents. The Act outraged the great liberal legal historian and theorist of the rule of law, A.V. Dicey, who charged that it

confers upon a trade union a freedom from civil liability for the commission of even the most heinous wrong by the union or its servants, and in short confers upon every trade union a privilege and protection

not possessed by any other person or body of persons, whether corporate or unincorporate, throughout the United Kingdom It makes a trade union a privileged body exempted from the ordinary law of the land. No such privileged body has ever before been deliberately created by an English Parliament. [46]

It is ironic that the immense power of the British labor unions, the *bête noire* of Margaret Thatcher, was brought into being with the enthusiastic help of her great hero, Winston Churchill.

World War I

In 1911, Churchill became First Lord of the Admiralty, and now was truly in his element. Naturally, he quickly allied himself with the war party, and, during the crises that followed, fanned the flames of war. When the final crisis came, in the summer of 1914, Churchill was the only member of the cabinet who backed war from the start, with all of his accustomed energy. Asquith, his own Prime Minister, wrote of him: "Winston very bellicose and demanding immediate mobilization.... Winston, who has got all his war paint on, is longing for a sea fight in the early hours of the morning to result in the sinking of the *Goeben*. The whole thing fills me with sadness." [47]

On the afternoon of July 28, three days before the German invasion of Belgium, he mobilized the British Home Fleet, the greatest assemblage of naval power in the history of the world to that time. As Sidney Fay wrote, Churchill ordered that:

The fleet was to proceed during the night at high speed and without lights through the Straits of Dover from Portland to its fighting base at Scapa Flow. Fearing to bring this order before the Cabinet, lest it should be considered a provocative action likely to damage the chances of peace, Mr. Churchill had only informed Mr. Asquith, who at once gave his approval. [48]

No wonder that, when war with Germany broke out, Churchill, in contrast even to the other chiefs of the war party, was all smiles, filled with a "glowing zest." [49]

From the outset of hostilities, Churchill, as head of the Admiralty, was instrumental in establishing the hunger blockade of Germany. This was probably the most effective weapon employed on either side in the whole conflict. The only problem was that, according to everyone's interpretation of international law except Britain's, it was illegal. The blockade was not "close-in," but depended on scattering mines, and many of the goods deemed contraband — for instance, food for civilians — had never been so classified before. [50] But, throughout his career, international law and the conventions by which men have tried to limit the horrors of war meant nothing to Churchill. As a German historian has dryly commented, Churchill was ready to break the rules whenever the very existence of his country was at stake, and "for him this was very often the case." [51]

The hunger blockade had certain rather unpleasant consequences. About 750,000 German civilians succumbed to hunger and diseases caused by malnutrition. The effect on those who survived was perhaps just as frightful in its own way. A historian of the blockade concluded: "the victimized youth [of World War I] were to become the most radical adherents of National Socialism." [52] It was also complications arising from the British blockade that eventually provided the pretext for Wilson's decision to go to war in 1917.

Whether Churchill actually arranged for the sinking of the *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915 is still unclear. [53] A week before the disaster, he wrote to Walter Runciman, president of the Board of Trade, that it was

"most important to attract neutral shipping to our shores, in the hopes especially of embroiling the United States with Germany." [54] Many highly placed persons in Britain and America believed that the German sinking of the *Lusitania* would bring the United States into the war.

The most recent student of the subject is Patrick Beesly, whose *Room 40* is a history of British Naval Intelligence in World War I. Beesly's careful account is all the more persuasive for going against the grain of his own sentiments. He points out that the British Admiralty was aware that German U-boat Command had informed U-boat captains at sea of the sailings of the *Lusitania*, and that the U-boat responsible for the sinking of two ships in recent days was present in the vicinity of Queenstown, off the southern coast of Ireland, in the path the *Lusitania* was scheduled to take. There is no surviving record of any specific warning to the *Lusitania*. No destroyer escort was sent to accompany the ship to port, nor were any of the readily available destroyers instructed to hunt for the submarine. In fact, "no effective steps were taken to protect the *Lusitania*." Beesly concludes:

unless and until fresh information comes to light, I am reluctantly driven to the conclusion that there was a conspiracy deliberately to put the Lusitania at risk in the hope that even an abortive attack on her would bring the United States into the war. Such a conspiracy could not have been put into effect without Winston Churchill's express permission and approval. [55]

In any case, what is certain is that Churchill's policies made the sinking very likely. The *Lusitania* was a passenger liner loaded with munitions of war; Churchill had given orders to the captains of merchant ships, including liners, to ram German submarines if they encountered them, and the Germans were aware of this. And, as Churchill stressed in his memoirs of World War I, embroiling neutral countries in hostilities with the enemy was a crucial part of warfare: "There are many kinds of maneuvers in war, some only of which take place on the battlefield.... The maneuver which brings an ally into the field is as serviceable as that which wins a great battle." [56]

In the midst of bloody conflict, Churchill was energy personified, the source of one brainstorm after another. Sometimes his hunches worked out well — he was the chief promoter of the tank in World War I — sometimes not so well, as at Gallipoli. The notoriety of that disaster, which blackened his name for years, caused him to be temporarily dropped from the Cabinet in 1915. [57] His reaction was typical: To one visitor, he said, pointing to the maps on the wall: "This is what I live for ... Yes, I am finished in respect of all I care for — the waging of war, the defeat of the Germans." [58]

Between the Wars

For the next few years, Churchill was shuttled from one ministerial post to another. As Minister of War — of Churchill in this position one may say what the revisionist historian Charles Tansill said of Henry Stimson as Secretary of War: no one ever deserved the title more — Churchill promoted a crusade to crush Bolshevism in Russia. As Colonial Secretary, he was ready to involve Britain in war with Turkey over the Chanak incident, but the British envoy to Turkey did not deliver Churchill's ultimatum, and in the end cooler heads prevailed. [59]

In 1924, Churchill rejoined the Conservatives and was made Chancellor of the Exchequer. His father, in the same office, was noted for having been puzzled by the decimals: what were "those damned dots"? Winston's most famous act was to return Britain to the gold standard at the unrealistic pre-war parity, thus severely damaging the export trade and ruining the good name of gold, as was pointed out by

Murray N. Rothbard.[\[60\]](#) Hardly anyone today would disagree with the judgment of A.J.P. Taylor: Churchill "did not grasp the economic arguments one way or the other. What determined him was again a devotion to British greatness. The pound would once more 'look the dollar in the face'; the days of Queen Victoria would be restored."[\[61\]](#)

So far Churchill had been engaged in politics for 30 years, with not much to show for it except a certain notoriety. His great claim to fame in the modern mythology begins with his hard line against Hitler in the 1930s. But it is important to realize that Churchill had maintained a hard line against Weimar Germany, as well. He denounced all calls for Allied disarmament, even before Hitler came to power.[\[62\]](#) Like other Allied leaders, Churchill was living a protracted fantasy: that Germany would submit forever to what it viewed as the shackles of Versailles. In the end, what Britain and France refused to grant to a democratic Germany they were forced to concede to Hitler. Moreover, if most did not bother to listen when Churchill fulminated on the impending German threat, they had good reason. He had tried to whip up hysteria too often before: for a crusade against Bolshevik Russia, during the General Strike of 1926, on the mortal dangers of Indian independence, in the abdication crisis. Why pay any heed to his latest delusion?[\[63\]](#)

Churchill had been a strong Zionist practically from the start, holding that Zionism would deflect European Jews from social revolution to partnership with European imperialism in the Arab world.[\[64\]](#) Now, in 1936, he forged links with the informal London pressure group known as The Focus, whose purpose was to open the eyes of the British public to the one great menace, Nazi Germany. "The great bulk of its finance came from rich British Jews such as Sir Robert Mond (a director of several chemical firms) and Sir Robert Waley-Cohn, the managing director of Shell, the latter contributing £50,000." The Focus was to be useful in expanding Churchill's network of contacts and in pushing for his entry into the Cabinet.[\[65\]](#)

Though a Conservative MP, Churchill began berating the Conservative governments, first Baldwin's and then Chamberlain's, for their alleged blindness to the Nazi threat. He vastly exaggerated the extent of German rearmament, formidable as it was, and distorted its purpose by harping on German production of heavy bombers. This was never a German priority, and Churchill's fabrications were meant to demonstrate a German design to attack Britain, which was never Hitler's intention. At this time, Churchill busily promoted the Grand Alliance[\[66\]](#) that was to include Britain, France, Russia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Since the Poles, having nearly been conquered by the Red Army in 1920, rejected any coalition with the Soviet Union, and since the Soviets' only access to Germany was through Poland, Churchill's plan was worthless.

Ironically — considering that it was a pillar of his future fame — his drumbeating about the German danger was yet another position on which Churchill reneged. In the fall of 1937, he stated:

Three or four years ago I was myself a loud alarmist.... In spite of the risks which wait on prophecy, I declare my belief that a major war is not imminent, and I still believe that there is a good chance of no major war taking place in our lifetime.... I will not pretend that, if I had to choose between Communism and Nazism, I would choose Communism.[\[67\]](#)

For all the claptrap about Churchill's "farsightedness" during the 30s in opposing the "appeasers," in the end the policy of the Chamberlain government — to rearm as quickly as possible, while testing the chances for peace with Germany — was more realistic than Churchill's.

The common mythology is so far from historical truth that even an ardent Churchill sympathizer, Gordon Craig, feels obliged to write:

The time is long past when it was possible to see the protracted debate over British foreign policy in the 1930s as a struggle between Churchill, an angel of light, fighting against the velleities of uncomprehending and feeble men in high places. It is reasonably well-known today that Churchill was often ill-informed, that his claims about German strength were exaggerated and his prescriptions impractical, that his emphasis on air power was misplaced.[\[68\]](#)

Moreover, as a British historian has recently noted: "For the record, it is worth recalling that in the 1930s Churchill did not oppose the appeasement of either Italy or Japan."[\[69\]](#) It is also worth recalling that it was the pre-Churchill British governments that furnished the material with which Churchill was able to win the Battle of Britain. Clive Ponting has observed:

the Baldwin and Chamberlain Governments ... had ensured that Britain was the first country in the world to deploy a fully integrated system of air defence based on radar detection of incoming aircraft and ground control of fighters ... Churchill's contribution had been to pour scorn on radar when he was in opposition in the 1930s.[\[70\]](#)

Notes:

This article originally appeared in slightly different form as a chapter of Ralph Raico's *Great Wars and Great Leaders: A Libertarian Rebuttal* (Auburn, Ala: Ludwig Van Mises Institute, 2010).

- [\[1\]](#) Harry V. Jaffa, "In Defense of Churchill," *Modern Age* 34, no. 3 (Spring 1992): 281. For what it is worth, Henry Kissinger, "With Faint Praise," *New York Times Book Review*, July 16, 1995, p. 7, has gone so far as to call Churchill "the quintessential hero."
- [\[2\]](#) Paul Addison, "Churchill and Social Reform," in *Churchill*, Robert Blake and William Roger Louis, eds. (New York: Norton, 1993), p. 57.
- [\[3\]](#) A sympathetic historian, Paul Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front 1900–1955* (London: Pimlico, 1993), p. 438, phrases the same point this way: "Since [Churchill] never allowed himself to be hampered by a fixed programme or a rigid ideology, his ideas evolved as he adapted himself to the times." Oddly enough, Churchill himself confessed, in 1898: "I do not care so much for the principles I advocate as for the impression which my words produce and the reputation they give me." Clive Ponting, *Churchill* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), p. 32.
- [\[4\]](#) For some of Churchill's distortions, see Tuvia Ben-Moshe, *Churchill: Strategy and History* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992), pp. 329–33; Dietrich Aigner, "Winston Churchill (1874–1965)," in *Politiker des 20. Jahrhunderts, 1, Die Epoche der Weltkriege*, Rolf K. Hocevar, et al., eds. (Munich: Beck, 1970), p. 318, states that Churchill, in his works on World War II, "laid the foundation of a legend that is nothing less than a straightforward travesty of the historical truth.... But the Churchill version

of World War II and its prehistory remains unshaken, the power of his eloquence extends beyond the grave." Aigner, incidentally, is an informed, scholarly critic of Churchill, and by no means a "right-wing radical."

- [5] Christopher Hitchens, *Blood, Class, and Nostalgia: Anglo-American Ironies* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), p. 186.
- [6] J.P.C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War 1789–1961* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961), p. 253.
- [7] For a skeptical account of Churchill in this period, see Clive Ponting, *1940: Myth and Reality* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1991).
- [8] Cf. A.J.P. Taylor, "The Statesman," in idem, et al., *Churchill Revised: A Critical Assessment* (New York: Dial Press, 1969), p. 26.
- [9] Henry Pelling, *Winston Churchill* (New York: Dutton, 1974), pp. 347–48, 355; and Paul Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front*, pp. 296–99.
- [10] Taylor, "The Statesman," p. 31; Robert Rhodes James, "Churchill the Politician," in A.J.P. Taylor, et al., *Churchill Revised*, p. 115, writes of "Churchill's extremely exaggerated claims of German air power."
- [11] Emrys Hughes, *Winston Churchill: British Bulldog* (New York: Exposition, 1955), p. 104.
- [12] "Churchill Extols Fascismo for Italy" *New York Times*, January 21, 1927. Churchill even had admiring words for Hitler; as late as 1937, he wrote: "one may dislike Hitler's system and yet admire his patriotic achievement. If our country were defeated, I hope we should find a champion as indomitable to restore our courage and lead us back to our place among the nations." James, "Churchill the Politician," p. 118. On the conditions of the Fascist takeover in Italy, see Ralph Raico, "Mises on Fascism and Democracy," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 12, no 1 (Spring 1996): 1-27.
- [13] Robin Edmonds, "Churchill and Stalin," in *Churchill*, Blake and Louis, eds., p. 326.
- [14] Norman Rose, *Churchill: The Unruly Giant* (New York: Free Press, 1994), p. 378.
- [15] J.F.C. Fuller, *The Second World War 1939–45: A Strategical and Tactical History* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1954), p. 218.
- [16] James, "Churchill the Politician," p. 79. The same quotation from Esher is cited and endorsed by Basil Liddell Hart, "The Military Strategist," in A.J.P Taylor, et al., *Churchill Revised*, p. 221.
- [17] David Irving, *Churchill's War*, vol. 1, *The Struggle for Power* (Bullsbrook, Western Australia: Veritas, 1987), p. 517.

- [18] Charles Masterman, cited in James, "Churchill the Politician," p. 71.
- [19] Hart, "The Military Strategist," pp. 173–74.
- [20] *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- [21] Churchill told Asquith's daughter in 1915: "I know this war is smashing and shattering the lives of thousands every moment — and yet — I cannot help it — I love every second I live." Michael Howard, "Churchill and the First World War," in *Churchill*, Blake and Louis, eds., p. 129.
- [22] Maurice Ashley, *Churchill as Historian* (New York: Scribner's, 1968), p. 228.
- [23] Ludwig von Mises, *Liberalism: A Socio-Economic Exposition*, Ralph Raico, trans. (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, [1927] 1985), pp. 23–27.
- [24] Ponting, *Churchill*, p. 23; Dietrich Aigner, *Winston Churchill: Ruhm und Legende* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1975), p. 31.
- [25] *Ibid.*, pp. 40–44.
- [26] Andrew Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp. 211–15. Roberts finds it ironic that, given Churchill's views on race, it was "he of all Prime Ministers [who] allowed Britain to start to become a multi-racial society" through Commonwealth immigration during his last "Indian Summer" administration, 1951–55.
- [27] Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Weapons of Satire: Anti-Imperialist Writings on the Philippine-American War*, Jim Zwick, ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1992), pp. 9–11.
- [28] Robert Rhodes James, "Churchill the Parliamentarian, Orator, and Statesman," in *Churchill*, Blake and Louis, eds., p. 510; Ponting, *Churchill*, p. 49.
- [29] Churchill at this time even spoke out in favor of state-enforced temperance, an amusing bit of hypocrisy in a man whose lifelong love of drink became legendary.
- [30] On the history of the German welfare state, absolutist and modern, see Gerd Habermann, *Der Wohlfahrtsstaat: Geschichte eines Irrwegs* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1994).
- [31] Addison, "Churchill and Social Reform," p. 60.
- [32] Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front, 1900–1955*, p. 59.
- [33] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

- [34] W. H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition*, vol. 2, *The Ideological Heritage* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 151–54.
- [35] E. P. Hennock, *British Social Reform and German Precedents: The Case of Social Insurance 1880–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp. 168–69.
- [36] Gordon A. Craig, "Churchill and Germany," in *Churchill*, Blake and Louis, eds., p. 24.
- [37] E. P. Hennock, "The Origins of British National Insurance and the German Precedent 1880–1914," in *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany*, W.J. Mommsen and Wolfgang Mock, eds. (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 88.
- [38] Winston Churchill, *Complete Speeches 1897–1963*, vol. 1, *1897–1908*, Robert Rhodes James, ed. (New York: Chelsea House, 1974), pp. 1029–30, 1032.
- [39] Winston Churchill, *Liberalism and the Social Problem* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), pp. 80–81.
- [40] *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 226.
- [41] *Ibid.*, p. 227.
- [42] Hennock, *British Social Reform*, pp. 157–60.
- [43] *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- [44] Ponting, *Churchill*, p. 83.
- [45] See, for instance, Churchill, *Liberalism and the Social Problem*, pp. 74–75.
- [46] A. V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Public Opinion in England during the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd. ed. (London: Macmillan, [1914] 1963), pp. xlv — xlvi.
- [47] Herbert Henry Asquith, *Memories and Reflections 1852–1927* (London: Cassell, 1928), 2, pp. 7, 21.
- [48] Sidney Fay, *Origins of the World War*, 2nd. rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, [1930] 1966), p. 495.
- [49] Lady Violet Asquith, cited in Hart, "The Military Strategist," p.182.
- [50] C. Paul Vincent, *The Politics of Hunger: The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1915–1919* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985); see also Ralph Raico, "The Politics of Hunger: A Review," *Review of Austrian Economics* 3 (1988): 253–59.
- [51] Aigner, *Winston Churchill (1874–1965)*, pp. 63–4.

- [52] Vincent, *Politics of Hunger*, p. 162. See also Peter Loewenberg, "The Psychohistorical Origins of the Nazi Youth Cohort," *American Historical Review* 76, no. 5 (December 1971): 1457–1502.
- [53] See Colin Simpson, *The Lusitania* (London: Penguin, [1972] 1983), who presents the case for Churchill's guilt; and Thomas A. Bailey and Paul B. Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster: An Episode in Modern Warfare and Diplomacy* (New York: Free Press, 1975), who attempt to exculpate him. See also Hitchens, *Blood, Class, and Nostalgia*, pp. 189–90.
- [54] Patrick Beesly, *Room 40: British Naval Intelligence 1914–18* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982), p. 90.
- [55] *Ibid.*, p. 122. Emphasis in original.
- [56] Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis* (New York: Scribner's, 1931), p. 300.
- [57] On the Dardanelles campaign, cf. Taylor, "The Statesman," pp. 21–22: "Once Churchill took up the idea, he exaggerated both the ease with which it could be carried through and the rewards it would bring. There was no enquiry into the means available. Churchill merely assumed that battleships could force the Straits unaided. When this failed, he assumed that there was a powerful army available for Gallipoli and assumed also that this inhospitable peninsula presented no formidable military obstacles. Beyond this, he assumed also that the fall of Constantinople would inflict a mortal blow on Germany. All these assumptions were wrong."
- [58] Hughes, *Winston Churchill: British Bulldog*, p. 78.
- [59] James, "Churchill the Politician," p. 93.
- [60] Murray N. Rothbard, *America's Great Depression* (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1963), pp. 131–37.
- [61] Taylor, "The Statesman," p. 27.
- [62] Aigner, *Winston Churchill (1874–1965)*, pp. 100–3. In connection with the Geneva disarmament conference 1931–32, Churchill expressed the same anti-German position as later: Germany would rise again. Aigner sees this as stemming from Churchill's social Darwinist philosophy.
- [63] Goronwy Rees, "Churchill in der Revision," *Der Monat*, Nr. 207 (Fall 1965): 12.
- [64] E.g., in Churchill's essay of February 1921, "Zionism vs. Bolshevism"; see Aigner, *Winston Churchill (1874–1965)*, p. 79. See also Oskar K. Rabinowicz, *Winston Churchill on Jewish Problems: A Half Century Survey*, published by the World Jewish Congress, British Section (London: Lincolns-Prager, 1956); and N. A. Rose, *The Gentile Zionists: A Study in Anglo — Zionist Diplomacy, 1929–1939* (London: Cass, 1973). Early on, Churchill had shared the view current among many right-wingers of the time, of

Bolshevism as a "Jewish" phenomenon: he referred to the Red leaders as "these Semitic conspirators" and "Jew Commissars." Norman Rose, *Churchill: The Unruly Giant*, ;p. 180.

- [65] John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p. 55. See also Irving, *Churchill's War*, pp. 54–65, 67–68, and 82–83. The group's full name was the Focus for the Defense of Freedom and Peace. For a history, see Eugen Spier, *Focus. A Footnote to the History of the Thirties* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1963). In March 1937, after a luncheon meeting with Churchill, Spier came to the conclusion that "destiny had marked him out to become the destroyer of Hitlerism." (Ibid., p. 112) In October 1937, a representative of the Focus, H. Wickham Steed, toured Canada and the United States. Among those he found "ready to take the Focus line" were Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, and Arthur Sulzberger, owner of the *New York Times*. In New York, Steed addressed the Council on Foreign Relations. Others with whom Steed met included the financiers Bernard Baruch and Felix Warburg. (Ibid., pp. 124–25.) On The Focus as well as other factors influencing British public opinion in regard to Germany in the 1930s, see Dietrich Aigner, *Das Ringen um England. Das deutsch-britische Verhältnis. Die öffentliche Meinung 1933–1939, Tragödie zweier Völker* (Munich/Esslingen: Bechtle, 1969).
- [66] Aigner, *Winston Churchill (1874–1965)*, p. 105–6; see also Irving, *Churchill's War*, pp. 38–40, 44–45, 78–79.
- [67] Hart, "The Military Strategist," p. 204.
- [68] Craig, "Churchill and Germany," p. 35.
- [69] Donald Cameron Watt, "Churchill and Appeasement," in *Churchill*, Blake and Louis, eds., p. 214.
- [70] Ponting, *Churchill*, p. 464.

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